
Rain Day to Focus on Automotive Safety

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Who among us hasn't experienced that sickening feeling as our rear tires lose their grip on the roadway, sending our vehicles fishtailing on wet pavement?

On Sunday, you can experience that feeling in safety, and gain a few pointers about how to handle the real thing.

The "Skid Monster," a creation of Frederik R. Mottola, professor emeritus at Southern Connecticut State University, will be one of many features and events at this weekend's second annual RAIN Day.

RAIN, or Reduce Accident Injuries Now, started last year and is coordinated by the Glastonbury Police Department.

Mottola's creation is one of several traffic-safety devices he pioneered in his 30 years as a traffic safety educator at the university.

It's surprisingly simple. The device, which costs \$5,000 to \$6,000, depending on the model, consists of two small tires that can pivot 360 degrees. The vehicle's two rear tires are removed and the device is connected in their place.

When the tires are locked in place, the vehicle drives like any regular car. But when the instructor flips a switch, the small tires unlock and pivot to send the car's rear end into a skid.

The purpose, Mottola said, is to teach drivers how to detect the initial skid early enough to start controlling it before it gets out of hand.

The slogan: "Control the auto, or the auto becomes a monster!"

"I often use the analogy of a tiger in a cage," said Mottola, who produced the device through his Cheshire-based company, Interactive Driving Systems Inc.

"The tiger is a beautiful animal with all of that energy harnessed in a cage. But if you inadvertently let it out, it takes a lot of energy and effort to even get it back under control," he said.

On Sunday, the Skid Monster will be attached to a Ford Taurus. And here's the fun part: Drivers can try their hand at it, with Mottola acting as instructor.

Because the car's speed will be kept around 15 to 20 mph and it will be driven in a large, open parking lot, even nervous or relatively inexperienced drivers can safely try it, he said.